



The Florida House of Representatives

Interim Project Report

December 16, 2005

Committee on Ethics & Elections

Representative Ron Reagan, Chair

Report on Development of the Florida Voter Registration System

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Voter Registration System (FVRS) is the result of legislation passed during the 2005 session in the form of HB 1589 (ch. 2005-278, Laws of Fla.). The legislation implemented the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). Section 303(a)(1)(A) of HAVA requires:

a single statewide voter registration list “ . . . defined, maintained, and administered at the State level . . . [with] a unique identifier [assigned] to each legally registered voter in the State. . . ”

FVRS will consolidate the voter databases from Florida's 67 counties to one centrally-located database at the Division of Elections (Division), making Florida compliant with HAVA requirements. In fact, Florida may be one of the few states to meet the HAVA requirements in a timely fashion.

Development and implementation of the FVRS appears to be progressing well, with expectations that the statewide voter registration system will be

launched on January 3, 2006, with few problems.

Over the past several months the developers of the FVRS have been in constant communication with all interested parties. On the county level this includes supervisors of elections, county staff, and voter registration vendors. At the Division level the parties involved are: IBM, the system integrator, Maximus, the project manager and the FVRS steering committee. There has been excellent cooperation with the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) to prepare for electronic registration as people apply for drivers' licenses and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) to coordinate the processing of convicted felon data.

During the 2005 winter meeting of the supervisors of elections in Clearwater Beach, a number of the vendors, supervisors and developers acknowledged that they expect some glitches, but they generally expected a successful release of the FVRS on January 3, 2006.

There are several local elections scheduled in January 2006 which will be

the initial test of the FVRS. Any major problems will likely occur in this first month of operation during the elections. The second critical test will occur during the general election of November 2006.

THE FVRS DESIGN CONCEPT

FVRS uses the best of modern computer system design. The system is divided into three areas: the data stored at the Division that houses the statewide voter database, the interface and the county voter registration systems.

The data stored at the Division contains all voters for the State of Florida. This interfaces with DHSMV for voter registration, FDLE for the felony conviction data, the Office of Vital Statistics for death information and the Office of Executive Clemency for restoration of civil rights.

The interface between the Division and supervisors of elections is conducted through web services. Most modern computer systems including the Florida House of Representatives' LEAGIS system are built around this concept. It allows dissimilar user interfaces and data storage to share the same data.

Each supervisor has a local copy of the its voter registration data so that if the network goes down on or near election day, the election may still seamlessly proceed. All the activities that occur on a local network will be updated on the statewide system through a series of computer messages, similar to the way e-mail messages sit in an "inbox" until they are read. Nothing should be lost in the event the network goes down.

Efforts have been made to assure that all duplicate registrations have been

identified and merged. This will affect the numbers of voters used for petition gathering and for candidates who want to contact voters with political messages by mail.

The integrity of the convicted felon data should be greatly enhanced. No longer will a voter be identified as a felon based solely on a computer match. Under the FVRS system, FDLE will conduct the initial match. This match will be forwarded to the Division's Bureau of Voter Registration Services. The Bureau will match by hand the information from FDLE to the signature, photo and personal identifiers in DHSMV records. Bureau staff will then verify that the person has indeed been convicted of a felony and not had their charges plead down to a misdemeanor through the Florida Association of Court Clerk's on-line court records. They will further verify these records with the Department of Corrections and the clemency records of the Office of Executive Clemency. After these steps have been completed the record will be sent to the applicable supervisor for final processing and determination of a person's eligibility to vote.

CONCLUSION

The new statewide voter registration system is a positive step forward in the integrity of our voting system. It appears that the FVRS project will be successful, but more will be known following its January 3, 2006 launch.

Prepared by Bob West.